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Harper, Roland McMillan

Divorce and crime on
Prince Edward Island
New Haven

c1930

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Caption title.

The title has been altered in ink (probably by
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rare on Prince Edward island.

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~~THE~~ DIVORCE AND CRIME ~~AND RACE~~ ON PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

By ROLAND M. HARPER

IN the *American Magazine* for December 1929, there is an article by William S. Dutton on Prince Edward Island, Canada, in which the comparative freedom of the island from crime and poverty is pointed out, and special emphasis laid on the scarcity of divorce. In summing up the characteristics of the population the author states that the early settlers were mostly Scotch, English, Irish, and Acadian French, the number of inhabitants declined from a peak of 109,078 in 1891 to 88,615 in 1921,¹ there are over 100,000 natives of the island living in the United States (over 30,000 of them in New England),² of whom a considerable proportion have attained distinction; and there are 49,000 Protestants.³ He says also "It is a notably prosperous island...

It has no crime problem as we know it,

no poverty problem." There is said to have been only one divorce granted there since 1868, although there are no legal obstacles to such procedure. The consensus of opinion among persons interviewed by the author was that divorce was almost unknown because of strong traditions against it.

In addition to the figures given by Mr. Dutton, there are many other kinds of

statistics available to throw light on social conditions in Prince Edward Island, and help explain the rarity of divorce and crime there. The most convenient source of information is the Canada Year Book, published annually.⁴ It contains a summary of the census returns for 1921, and a great variety of vital and economic statistics for earlier and later years, many of

them for each province separately. As

"...In the...statistics (on Prince Edward Island) there is perhaps a lesson for the United States. Our present crime wave and high and rapidly increasing divorce rate are probably due in large measure to too much pleasure-seeking and indulgence in luxuries....In the course of a year it costs about as much to own and operate an automobile as to feed, clothe and educate a child; so an automobile...generally means one child less in the family...."

¹The article contains a picture of an automobile license plate with a few words of advertising on it: a "booster" scheme which may be a reaction to the decrease of population; for two of our states which are progressing very slowly if at all have recently adopted a similar plan.

²The United States Census does not seem to have given statistics of nativity in such detail since 1880, but in that year there were only 7,537 natives of Prince Edward Island in this country (representing a little more than 1 per cent of all British-American immigrants), and over half of them were in New England (3,613 in Massachusetts and 710 in the other five states). The state census of Massachusetts found 13,648 Prince Edward Islanders in that state in 1905 and 16,859 in 1915, but it is hardly conceivable that the migration to the

United States since 1880 could have exceeded the present population of the island. The Canadian census of 1921 found only 17,331 natives of Prince Edward living in other parts of Canada.

³In Canada, as in several European countries, but not in the United States, information about religious affiliations is gathered by census enumerators, who try to classify the whole population, evidently counting infants as having the same religion as their parents. In this country the religious census is conducted by correspondence with church officials, and in most denominations only persons who have voluntarily joined the church (approximately half the total population) are counted.

⁴The writer has only the 1925 edition, but

Prince Edward Island is a province by itself, and many of the statistics are given in the form of ratios, the differences between it and the rest of the country are very easily observed. Similar ratios can be obtained for the United States without much trouble, and they will serve as a sort of standard of comparison, for readers who are familiar with conditions in this country. Several of these differences between Prince Edward Island, Canada and the United States are shown in a table farther on, and others will be discussed in the text.

RESOURCES AND INDUSTRIES

The bed-rock of Prince Edward Island is said to be mostly red sandstone and shale, which disintegrates readily, so that there are no elevations on the island exceeding 500 feet above sea-level. The mineral production of the province is so insignificant that it is not listed separately in the census tables. The scarcity of building stone and brick clay is illustrated by the fact that over 99 per cent of the houses on the island are built of wood, as compared with about 73 per cent of wood, 22 per cent brick, and 2 per cent stone in the whole of Canada. (Ontario has over 40 per cent brick, and Quebec has about 5 per cent stone.) The soil must be a little above the average of Canada (or the United States) in fertility, for at the time of the last census 54.8 per cent of the total area was classed as improved farm land, and all farm land occupied 87 per cent. But fertile soil does not necessarily imply prosperity, as will be shown farther on.

The climate is said to be a little milder than that of the neighboring mainland, on account of the surrounding ocean, but nine miles of ice between the island and mainland make communication a little difficult in winter.

On account of the large cultivated area, the forests are not very extensive. The lumber production of the province in 1923 was less than one-tenth of 1 per cent of the Canadian total, and if any

Mr. Dutton seems to have had access to a later one. Some still later figures, for 1927 and 1928, have been obtained from the Dominion Bureau of Statistics.

pulpwood (which is nearly as important as lumber in Canada) was produced it was not mentioned in the statistics. There is naturally a good deal of fishing in the surrounding salt waters, and in recent years the value of fish products of Prince Edward Island has averaged between 3 and 4 per cent of the Canadian total. Only about 3 per cent of the population of the island was engaged in manufacturing in 1923, as compared with 6 per cent in the whole country (and about 9 per cent in the United States at the same time). And most of the so-called manufacturing was the packing of fish products, operating only a part of the year.

By far the greater part of the population is engaged in farming, and the value of agricultural products exceeds that of the forests, fisheries and factories combined. Many of the farmers specialize in seed potatoes and others in fox furs, and the island has acquired quite a reputation in those lines. But these specialists are in the minority, and the average farmer is not as prosperous as one might infer from published accounts, and especially from the fancy prices sometimes paid for silver foxes or their skins.

POPULATION

It is convenient to remember that Prince Edward Island contains just about 1 per cent of the population of Canada, and less than a thousandth of the total area, so that in making comparisons with the rest of Canada we can use statistics for the whole country without appreciable error.

It is the most densely populated of all the provinces, with about 40 inhabitants per square mile, which is just about the maximum density that an agricultural population with American standards of living can have. (Iowa, one of our most fertile states, has about the same density, and if cities were excluded it would be considerably less. Its population too is nearly stationary.) No considerable increase can be expected in the near future.

"The fur farming industry of Prince Edward Island, referred to incidentally in Mr. Dutton's article, is described in detail by F. A. Stilgenbauer in 'Economic Geography' (Worcester, Mass.) for January, 1927, and there are numerous statistics on the subject in the 1928 Year Books.

Dec. 21, 1911, 182

without some development of manufacturing—for which Prince Edward is not well adapted,—or a lowering of the standards of living. And the decrease in recent decades may indicate a rising standard of living.

A dense population and a large proportion of urban population commonly go together, but Prince Edward Island is an exception to that. Less than one-fourth of the inhabitants of the province live in incorporated places, as compared with about half in the rest of Canada, and three-fifths in the United States. The only town of any size on the island is Charlottetown, the capital, with about 11,000 inhabitants, and there are two or three others with between one and three thousand.

An indirect measure of prosperity is the relative number of adults and children, or the size of families; for most adults are producers of wealth and most children are not. In the percentage of adults Prince Edward Island is a little below the rest of Canada, and the United States, though above the rural population of the United States. (See table, page 189). Up to the early years of the present century its families were the largest in Canada, and they are still above the Canadian and United States average, though now surpassed by those of the three nearest mainland provinces.

The composition of families is also significant, for that has an important bearing on the average age of (first) marriage, and on fecundity. If it was customary for every young man and woman to marry at the age of twenty-one, and found a new family, there would be just about one man and one woman per family, for the occasional loss of husband or wife would be about balanced by the number of old people living with their married children. But if a young person remains single for a time after passing twenty-one, then he (or she) becomes an extra adult in some family, either that of his parents or in a boarding-house elsewhere. Prince Edward Island has fewer adults per family

than the rest of Canada, but more than in the United States.

Another interesting point about the families of Prince Edward Island is that nearly every family has a house by itself; which must be regarded as a healthy state of affairs. The ratio of families to dwellings there is even lower than in the rural population of the United States, considerably lower than in the rest of Canada, and much lower than in our urban population.

Statistics of the average age of marriage are available for most of the Canadian provinces, but not yet for the United States, except for a few states and cities. From these it appears that the average in 1927 was a year or two later in Prince Edward Island (males 31.3, females 26.3) than the average for the "registration area" of Canada (males 29.3, females 25.1); which seems to conflict with the evidence afforded by the number of adults per family, at least as far as men are concerned. But these figures include all marriages, and it is possible that there are more second marriages than usual in Prince Edward Island. More exact information on this point would be desirable. The median age of first marriage for various race and nativity groups in the United States in 1920 is indicated by a graph recently published in this magazine by the writer, and that together with the statistics of composition of families given in the table below makes it reasonably certain that people tend to marry a little later in Canada than in the United States.*

The marriage rate is generally correlated with the average age of marriage, but the correlation may be greatly modified by migration. Although first marriages probably take place a little earlier in Prince Edward than in the rest of Canada, the marriage rate there is very low, and not much more than half what it is in the United States. The population has decreased in recent

*Eugenics, Oct., 1929, fig. 6, on page 31.

*The average age of marriage is probably correlated to some extent with latitude or climate, for it is earlier in the southern than in the northern United States, as can be shown statistically.

*See Scientific Monthly, 30:164-165. "Feb." 1930.

decades, as already shown, and as that is not due to any deficiency of births, it implies extensive migration. And as migrants everywhere are mostly young adults, it is pretty certain that many natives of Prince Edward leave the island before attaining marriageable age, and their subsequent marriages are thus not credited to the island."

Although there is said to have been but one divorce on the island since 1868, the census of 1921 found twenty-four men and eighteen women there who had been "divorced or legally separated"; some of them presumably divorced elsewhere. The ratio of divorced persons to total population in all of Canada, however, is low, less than double that of Prince Edward Island, and less than one-fifth that in the United States. But divorce seems to be increasing rapidly in Canada, as in this country, there having been over ten times as many divorced persons there in 1921 as in 1901, while the population increased only 63.5 per cent at the same time."

The birth rate seems to be lower in Prince Edward Island than in the rest of Canada, and about the same as in the northern United States, while the death rate is a little higher in some years. But the rather large families are doubtless due to a higher birth rate in previous years. Infant mortality is considerably less there than in the rest of Canada, but greater in

some years than in the registration area of the United States.

CULTURE

Among measures of culture a fairly good though indirect one is the sex ratio, either at birth or for the total living population. In the United States there seem to be few if any exceptions to the rule that the most cultured communities, and those which have produced the largest number of noted persons," have the largest proportion of females, not only among adults (which might be explained by the migration of men to frontier regions"), but also in the first year of life. And the proportion of females is practically always larger in cities than in rural districts. Prince Edward Island, like all other Canadian provinces, and most states in the United States, has always had more males than females, but the numbers of the sexes are more nearly equal there than in any other province, notwithstanding the predominantly rural population, and an increase in the proportion of males on the island between 1911 and 1921." And in a few recent years there have been more female than male births there, which is not true of any other Canadian province as a whole, or any state in the Union (though it might be of some cities).

A more direct measure of culture is the illiteracy count, but that is not very

"The same tendency is shown very well by a group of ten counties in eastern Virginia, whose population has been practically stationary ever since the first census of the United States was taken in 1790, although there are about twice as many births as deaths there. In those counties the marriage rate is only about half the state average, doubtless for the reason above given.

"It is quite likely, though, that many of the divorced persons in Canada were divorced in the United States, whether or not they lived in Canada previously; for the laws of Canada are said to make divorce rather difficult. In 1921 there was about one divorce to 100 marriages in Canada, as compared with one to eight in the United States at the same time. (For 1928 the corresponding figures are one to ninety-five and one to six.) England also has a very low ratio, one to 114 according to a recent newspaper item. Near the other extreme is "Middletown" (Muncie, Ind.), discussed by the writer in *Eugenics* for December (pp. 12-13).

"Mr. Dutton mentions that a large number of noted persons claim Prince Edward Island as their birthplace, but gives no statistics. And the nativity statistics in *Who's Who in America* do not separate the several Canadian provinces.

"But Ireland is said to have more men than women, in spite of the vast emigration from that island for a century and more. In that respect it is quite different from England, and most other European countries.

"On page 94 of the Canada Year Book for 1923 is the following interesting statement:—"Masculinity in the country as a whole and also in all the provinces except Prince Edward Island, has been since 1911 on the decline—a phenomenon which must be regarded with satisfaction, since an approximation to equality in the numbers of the sexes is desirable.... in the interests of morality." On the next page there is a table showing the sex ratio in 31 different countries in recent years.

satisfactory, for it makes no distinction between college graduates and persons barely able to read and write, and if an illiterate claims to be able to read, a census enumerator is not likely to challenge him to prove it. However, in that respect Prince Edward Island makes a decidedly better showing than the rest of Canada, and the Canadian average is about the same as that for the white population of the United States. In school attendance the differences between Prince Edward Island and the rest of Canada, and the United States average, are comparatively small.

WEALTH

Age distribution has been mentioned above as an indirect measure of wealth. There are several more direct measures available. The Canadian Bureau of Statistics made an estimate of wealth by provinces at the time of the last census, and found the per capita wealth of Prince Edward Island to be only a little more than half the Canadian average, and less than half the average for the United States as estimated by our Census Bureau as of Dec. 31, 1922. (See table, page 189.)

This difference might be attributed partly to the small amount of city property on the island; but farm property tells a similar story. Over 90 per cent of the farmers on Prince Edward own their farms, which is a better showing than for the rest of Canada, but the farms are smaller than the average, and the value of property per farm there is only about half the Canadian average, and less than one-third of the United States average. (For details see table, page 189.) However, wealth is probably more evenly distributed on the island than on the mainland, for about 40 per cent of the farms on the island are between fifty and one hundred acres in area, as compared with 22 per cent in the whole country, and the proportion of very large and very small farms is correspondingly less; which helps explain the absence of poverty referred to by Mr. Dutton.

Not only are the farms comparatively small and cheap, but farm wages are low. The estimated annual wages (including the value of board furnished) for farm hands

in 1921, according to the Canada Year Book, were \$460 for males and \$287 for females on Prince Edward Island, and \$669 for males and \$449 for females in the whole of Canada. Factory wages tell a somewhat similar story. In 1923 the average annual income of wage-earners in factories was \$179 on Prince Edward and \$959 in the whole of Canada, according to the Canada Year Book, as compared with \$1,255 for the United States in the same year. The greater part of the so-called manufacturing in Prince Edward Island was in fish-preserving establishments, which operate only two to four months out of the year; but even if the Prince Edward figures were multiplied by four they would still be less than the Canadian average."

In 1921 there was only about one automobile to every fifty persons on Prince Edward Island, as compared with one to nineteen in the whole of Canada, and one to 11.5 in the United States. But the differences are less now, for the corresponding figures for 1928 are about sixteen, nine and five. In the latter year there was about one telephone to every eighteen persons on the island, one to nine in Canada, and one to seven in the United States.

In recent years the annual consumption of tobacco in Canada has averaged between three and four pounds per capita, which is about half the figure for the United States. Statistics by provinces are not available, but it is a reasonable guess that the indulgence of Prince Edward Islanders in this, as in other luxuries, is below the Dominion average.

CRIME

Statistics of crime are not very reliable, for the definition of crime varies at different times and places. But the Canada Year Book shows that the convictions for all offences in 1921 in Prince Edward Island were only about one-fifth of one

"In the corresponding figures for the United States the seasonal fluctuations are eliminated, or nearly so, by ascertaining the average number of wage-earners for the whole year; so that a factory which ran only six months of the year and employed 100 hands would be rated as having an average of 50.

per cent of the Canadian total, although the island has about one per cent of the Dominion's population. And in the more serious ("indictable") offences, the island's ratio to the whole country is less than one in a thousand. In 1928 there were about 55 per cent more convictions in Canada than in 1921, and Prince Edward had about one-fourth of one per cent of the total; but of course the proportions may fluctuate from year to year, and the great difference between 1921 and 1928 does not necessarily indicate a "crime wave". About 80 per cent of all the offences on the island in 1928, either ordinary or indictable, were in Queen's County, which includes Charlottetown, but has less than half the population of the province. So evidently crime is most prevalent in cities there, as it seems to be in this country.

STATISTICS

In the subjoined table the figures in the first two columns are all for 1921, and those for the United States for 1920, except that a few data for thirty years earlier are inserted for comparison. The United States vital statistics are for 1921, and the United States per capita wealth for 1922. (The value of purchasing power of the dollar is fluctuating all the time, but it does not change much in a year or two.) Some of the Canadian statistics exclude the very sparsely settled territories north of latitude 60 degrees, but that makes very little difference in any of the ratios except density of population. In some of the Canadian tables on vital statistics, totals are given for the "registration area" (which excludes Quebec and the territories) and also for the registration area plus Quebec; and the latter figures are used here. The United States figures on births and deaths are for the registration area, which has been gradually expanding, but does not yet include a few of the southern and western states.

"Urban" population in the Canadian census includes all incorporated places, instead of only those with over 2,500 inhabitants, as in this country, but corresponding figures for the United States are available, and they have been used in the

lines dealing with the per cent of population in incorporated places. In the last two columns, contrasting the urban and rural population of the United States, the line is drawn at 2,500, except that in the statistics of births and deaths "urban" means only cities with over 10,000 inhabitants, and "rural" the rest of the population. But that perhaps does not make much difference in the birth and death rates.

In the Canada Year Book there are a few 1923 vital statistics for cities of over 10,000 inhabitants, and from these it appears that Charlottetown had a slight excess of females, a marriage rate of 12.5 per thousand, birth rate 27.1, death rate 23.6, and only 2.17 births per marriage (presumably including many non-resident births in hospitals); all of which can be contrasted with the corresponding figures for the whole province and country in the table. (The 1928 figures show a decided slump in the number of births per marriage in the city, province, and country.)

The United States figures are for all races combined. It would have been more scientific to restrict them to whites, for the population of Canada is nearly all white* (but some of the census tables exclude Indians), but that would not have made much difference, for the population of the United States is about nine-tenths white. And some of the United States statistics, such as those of marriages and per capita wealth, do not separate the races anyway.

Most of the Canadian statistics have been copied direct from the Year Book, but a larger proportion of those for the United States have had to be computed, either because they are not published in the census tables, or in order to carry some small numbers out to one more decimal place so as to make closer comparisons.

Some additional statistics which are less exact, or pertain to years subsequent to 1921, or are not available for the urban and rural population of the United States separately, have already been given in the text.

*In 1921 Canada had only 1.26 per cent of Indians, and Prince Edward Island 0.27 per cent, and Negroes and all other colored races combined were still fewer.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we may reasonably assume that the rarity of divorce on Prince Edward Island is not only due to tradition, as stated by Mr. Dutton, but is correlated with a predominantly rural population, large families (with marriage no earlier than the average), nearly all in owned one-family houses, people living a simple life with few luxuries, but few paupers and still fewer wealthy persons, and a comparatively high culture in spite of little wealth. The same factors, or most of them, doubtless operate also to keep crime at a minimum.

But this ideal condition may not last indefinitely. With the decreasing families, and increase in urban population and the use of automobiles and other luxuries, perhaps a generation from now Prince Edward Island will have a divorce rate and a crime rate similar to that of the rest of Canada today, or the United States a generation ago.

APPLICATION TO THE UNITED STATES

In the foregoing statistics there is perhaps a lesson for the United States. Our present crime wave and high and rapidly increasing divorce rate are probably due in large measure to too much pleasure-seeking and indulgence in luxuries, though of course the problem is a complex one. In the matter of automobiles, there seems to be a fairly close correlation between them and divorce. In the course of a year it costs about as much to own and operate an automobile as to feed, clothe and educate a child; so an automobile used mainly for pleasure generally means one child less in the family, and smaller families mean more divorces. In this country wealth, automobiles and divorces have all increased faster than the popula-

tion in recent years (except that the per capita wealth, as measured in purchasing power, decreased a little during the World War period), and they are all more prevalent in the urban than in the rural population, and the urban population is increasing faster than the rural. Near one extreme at the present time is California, with about one automobile to every three persons in 1929 (more than one car per family), one divorce to every 3.3 marriages in 1928, a per capita wealth of \$4,007 in 1922, 68 per cent of the population urban, 67.6 per cent adults, 1.16 families per dwelling, and 3.81 persons per family in 1920. Near the other extreme is Georgia, with about one car (or truck) to 7.7 persons in 1929, one divorce to every fourteen marriages in 1928 (in spite of considerable divorce business from South Carolina, whose laws do not allow divorce), a per capita wealth of \$1,306 in 1922, 25.1 per cent urban, 49.1 per cent adults, 1.07 families per dwelling, and 4.61 persons per family in 1920. Texas, which is partly southern and partly western in its civilization, is intermediate in all these respects, the corresponding figures for it being 4, 4.2, \$2,010, 32.4, 52.1, 1.08, and 4.58.¹² In Europe both automobiles and divorces seem to be proportionately much fewer than in the United States.

¹²See Geographical Review, 14:641-643. Oct. 1924.

¹³Of course if the races were separated in the statistics the whites of Georgia and other southern states would make a better showing in wealth and automobiles. But there is very little difference between the races, in any one state, in size of families, or in the divorce rate. Figures on marriage and divorce for counties with a large majority of Negroes show very little difference in those respects from those whose population is nearly all white; and this is confirmed also by the vital statistics of Virginia, which have separate figures for the two races.

Selected statistics of Prince Edward Island, Canada, and the United States, mostly for 1921 or 1920.

	P.E.I.	Canada	United States		
			Total	Urban	Rural
Inhabitants per square mile	40.6	2.41	35.5	----	----
Per cent increase in 10 years	-5.46	21.95	14.9	----	----
Per cent living in incorporated places, 1891 (U.S., 1890)	13.07	31.80	43.0	----	----
1921 (U.S., 1920)	21.55	49.52	59.9	----	----
Per cent males, 1921 (or 1920)	50.7	51.5	51.0	50.1	51.9
Urban	47.1	49.2	50.1	50.1	----
Rural	51.6	53.6	51.9	----	51.9
Per cent adults	55.7	58.4	57.5	62.4	52.4
Per cent under 10 years old	21.9	22.3	21.8	19.0	24.6
Families per dwelling, 1891 (or 1890)	1.01	1.05	1.10	?	?
1921 (or 1920)	1.01	1.08	1.18	1.35	1.03
Persons per family, 1891 (or 1890)	5.96	5.26	4.93	?	?
1921 (or 1920)	4.71	4.62	4.34	4.24	4.45
Composition of families, 1921 (1920)					
Men	1.32	1.41	1.29	1.34	1.23
Women	1.31	1.29	1.21	1.32	1.10
Children	2.08	1.92	1.94	1.58	2.12
Children per woman	1.59	1.49	1.52	1.20	1.92
Marriage rate, per thousand (1921)	5.8	8.0	10.7	?	?
Births per marriage, 1921	4.16	3.69	2.15	?	?
Ratio of male to female births, 1921	.991	1.080	1.059	?	?
Birth rate, 1921	24.3	29.4	24.3	24.0	24.7
Death rate	13.6	11.6	11.7	12.2	11.2
Infant mortality rate	83.5	102.0	76.0	78.0	74.0
Per cent illiterate (over 10)	3.07	5.10	5.96	4.45	7.68
Per cent of farms owned	94.2	85.7	60.9	----	----
Acres per farm	88.7	198.0	148.2	----	----
Improved, do.	56.0	99.6	78.0	----	----
Values per farm (\$)					
Land	2079	4670	8503	----	----
Buildings	1261	1945	1781	----	----
Implements & Machinery	501	936	557	----	----
Live-stock	587	901	1243	----	----
Per capita wealth, 1921 (U.S., 1922)	1353	2525	2918	----	----

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE

This article as originally published was illustrated by three half-tones, made from photographs borrowed by the editor. These are omitted from the reprints, and this has necessitated shifting the text so that the page numbers no longer correspond

with the original, except the first two, and this one containing the statistical table. The last half page of text, which was somewhat of a digression from the main theme, is also omitted, in order to keep the reprint from exceeding the convenient size of eight pages.

**END OF
TITLE**